

As I stood at the September COMA membership meeting looking out at the 130+ members in attendance and knowing that Naples had as many or more at their meeting, I wondered what vision and work went into the creation of this successful professional networking organization. I knew generally that Bill Carter and a small group of Managers had started the group about 12 years ago but I wanted to know “the rest of the story”. I hope that you will also find this genesis interesting.

In 1993 Bill Carter joined CAI for the educational classes and to network with managers. He soon approached the leadership and asked how he could be help within the organization. At that time they needed help developing the membership. Bill worked at recruiting a membership committee and the first year CAI’s membership doubled Bill suggested a networking dinner would be a great way to network with those that serviced this industry. He organized the first networking dinner to complement the education class. The attendance was impressive for a first networking meeting. The CAI Board of Directors, decided the networking component was not what CAI’s purpose of educational meetings were about and cancelled the networking portion of future meetings. Bill felt the networking part of the meeting was the key to the industries needs and growth.

In subsequent discussions with Jim Nowortya, Jerry Light and Paul Sapp, the idea was born to form a new non-profit professional organization serving condominium managers and affiliates. The organization would be named COMA, an acronym for Condominium Owners–Managers & Associates. “A Florida non-profit educational and informational networking organization created to promote lines of communication for the benefit of Condominium Owners, Community Associations, Community Managers and Affiliated Professionals.” We had no seed money to start this idea, Jim Nowortya General Manager of Myerlee Manor said he would provide the mailing if Bill would do the rest of organizing. The first COMA meeting was held at Myerlee Manor in March of 1995 and 20 managers and affiliates showed up for networking and dinner. COMA WAS BORN

The first Board of Directors included:

Bill Carter	Jim Averett	Marti White	Walter Tumiat
Bobbie Golfes	Tom Duffy	Paul Sapp	

And COMA grew from there. A large portion of new members were members from other organization who saw the value in combining a dinner meeting with educational classes. In May of 1995, Bill became a provider of education with the State of Florida and brought in qualified credit CEU (continuing education classes). COMA's organization incorporated as a non-profit on June 4th 1996. Since then COMA has moved their education and networking meetings from Myerlee Manor to several location and now to Colonial Country Club. Each move was made to accommodate growth. The Naples chapter was added in 1997 to fill a need for members in Collier County. As of this writing, the Naples chapter has more members than that of the Fort Myers chapter and both chapters continue to grow. I asked Bill Carter if other chapters might be added in the foreseeable future. Bill says he does not have the time or energy to start other chapters. "If other chapters are formed someone else will need to provide the energy and impetus for that".

Dave Williams, the current President, feels that the membership needs to be more balanced. They see the ratio of Managers to affiliates being closer to 50/50 as an ideal. COMA is looking for more Managers. Do you know a Manager who can benefit from COMA membership?

The major challenges encountered along the way, according to Bill, were maintaining the original concept and procedures and holding true to the vision. That vision being that the organization exists to provide services to the community that serves Community Associations.

I asked Bill Carter what the future looked like for COMA and if and when he might retire from leadership. Bill believes the success of COMA is related to the original concept and procedures and staying faithful to the vision from which the organization was born. And retire? I don't see that happing any time soon. This is a labor of love for me.

**Bill Moody
Rest Assured Home Watch**